



*The School of*  
Evolutionary Herbalism

# THE ZODIACAL STUDY STRATEGY

BOTANICAL CONSTELLATIONS

## The Zodiacal Study Strategy

*Have you ever felt overwhelmed trying to learn herbal medicine and astrology?*

This is one of the biggest challenges I hear from people studying herbalism on its own... throw astrology on top of it, and it just seems like too much. They say, “I was already overwhelmed trying to learn how to become a great herbalist. And now, to practice this way, I have to learn the massive system of astrology too. I’m busy with my day job, family, home, and garden, and it’s too much.”

*But it doesn’t have to be that way!* There is a strategic approach that allows you to study herbal medicine and astrology *at the same time*. The philosophical bases of both herbal medicine and astrology are, at their core, one and the same- for they are built off the same fundamental blueprint of nature.

When you study these fundamental principles and patterns of astrology and herbalism simultaneously, it enhances your learning of both systems, making it quicker to learn them and thus incorporate them into your work with people.

This is what I call the Zodiacal Study Strategy.

It is a model for study that you can incorporate into the time you have available—or rather the time you create—to optimize your learning process of both herbalism and astrology. It is built on the similarities between the philosophical foundations of holistic herbalism and astrology, or what I think of as the architecture of the zodiac.

As with anything worth learning, you must make time to study, integrate, and practice. Unfortunately, it won’t magically appear. What differentiates a good herbalist or astrologer from a great one is discipline and consistency in studying and gaining experience. *And it’s about using your time strategically.* What follows is one year’s worth of study. By the end of that year, you will have a solid foundation in both astrological medicine and clinical herbal medicine.

### The Architecture of the Zodiac

The 12 signs of the zodiac are fundamental to the study of astrology. But many fail to realize that these 12 signs form a pattern for approaching your studies in astrology and herbalism. When we dissect a zodiac sign, we see that its architecture is comprised of three fundamental qualities, or layers of energetics:

1. One of three modes: cardinal, mutable, or fixed.
2. One of four elements: Earth, Water, Air, or Fire.
3. Planetary associations. There are seven inner planets: the Sun, Moon, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mercury. There are also three outer planets: Neptune, Pluto, and Uranus. Some signs have two planets associated with them, a traditional rulership based on the time when only seven planets were known, and a modern rulership that may include one of the three outer planets.

Thus, each sign is associated with a mode, an element, and a planet. These three layers of energetics—modes, elements, and planets—are referred to in the Evolutionary Herbalism approach as the “energetic architecture” pattern. When we observe herbal traditions from around the world, we see there are indeed distinct patterns based on the same structure. These form the basis of the connection between herbalism and astrology.

### Astrological and Herbal Correlations

In many of the world’s traditional medicine systems, from Āyurvedic medicine to Chinese and Galenic medicine to Unani-Tibb, this architecture is built in. Some of the North American traditions—such as physiomedicalism— have this too, even though they don’t use esoteric terminology like three principles or talk about the elements. But when you look deeper, you can see this architecture is there. When we study herbal medicine cross-culturally, we see that there are a lot of similarities in the underlying structure of each system. These are also very similar to the underlying structure of astrology.

For example, Galenic medicine and Unani-Tibb, the Arabic system of herbal medicine derived from the Greek system, are based on the four elements. They’re also based on the classic four-humor system of black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. In this system, people are classified according to their temperaments: phlegmatic, melancholic, sanguine, and choleric.

These four elements are also at the basis of an energetic understanding of people and plants, which are derived from fundamental qualities of temperature (hot and cold) and moisture (damp and dry). While Greek philosophers argued as to whether the



elements or qualities were more primal (this was one difference between Plato and Aristotle), that point is not our concern. What's more important is that *there is a direct correlation between the fundamental qualities of people and plants with the elements*. This four-fold model is extended further as herbs are also classified into four degrees, which describes the relative strength of a plant's medicinal properties. The first degree is mild, and the fourth degree is harsh, even borderline toxic. So we can see that the basic framework for these systems of medicine is the elements.

In herbal traditions, we can also find the triune pattern—reflected in astrology as the three modes. The *tridosha* system of Āyurveda is a great example of this, with *vāta*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. These three *doshas* resemble the three modes of astrology—cardinal, mutable, and fixed. *Pitta dosha*, with its active, dynamic nature, is cardinal; *vāta*, with its changeability, airiness, and ethereal quality, is mutable; and *kapha* is stable, grounded, and earthy in nature and is fixed. The three *doshas* create seven primary constitutions—pure *pitta*, pure *vāta*, pure *kapha*, *kapha-pitta*, *kapha-vāta*, *vāta-pitta*, and *tridoshic*, where *vata pitta* and *kapha* are equal in proportion. These seven primary constitutional patterns relate to the seven planets. Āyurveda has seven *dhātu*, or tissues, which are also closely connected to the seven planets.

Chinese medicine has 12 meridians, which are likened to the 12 signs of the zodiac. The three treasures (*qi*, *jing*, and *shen*) and the triple-burner somewhat correlate to the three modes.

Anytime we're cross-comparing traditions, there will be variances and subtle distinctions. So, the five elements of Chinese medicine are a bit different from Āyurveda and the four elements of Western systems. The latter represent the elements more as states of matter or being, whereas the former sees them as specific transformation processes. They have clear connections, but they're not always direct one-to-one correlations.

When studying astrological medicine, you can see the pattern of Mars and realize that it's the choleric humor and *pitta* excess, which is similar to a Liver fire rising pattern in Chinese medicine. These are all quite similar to what the Physiomedicalists might have described as heat, irritation, or excitation tissue states. If you already have a grasp of Ayurveda, Western herbalism, or TCM, you can study astrological medicine and quickly get a sense of these correlations. This is because all of these systems are based on a direct observation of the fundamental patterns of nature.

No matter where you are in the world, these patterns are the same because we all live on the same planet. We all share the same universal elements. When we look at the stars, they look a little different in India than they do in North America. The perspective is slightly different, but ultimately, we're looking at the same thing.



This is why herbal medicine traditions bear the same foundational patterns that we find at the roots of astrology: a seven, four (or five), and a three-fold pattern. The best approach to learning these is to study the universal pattern itself, and then when you get into the specifics of each tradition, it all falls into place and makes much more sense. This is at the foundation of the premise of a planetary, or integrative, system of herbal medicine.

### Patterns in People, Patterns in Plants

It's one thing to look at the general relationships between the fundamental pattern of astrology and herbal traditions. Still, for it to be a practically applicable system, we have to get more specific about how these patterns relate to people and plants. That is what brings the system to life!

When we look at people, we can see that each modal, elemental, and planetary quality relates to specific constitutional patterns. They govern specific organ systems and tissues of the body. They correlate to tissue state energetics or pathological patterns, such as specific disease states. They also, as many know from an astrological perspective, relate to character traits, psychological states, and emotional qualities. They can also reveal pathways for our soul's evolution.

Some people think of astrology as understanding personality traits and characteristics. While this is certainly true, it unfortunately ignores another important aspect of these archetypes: they also relate to the *physical body*. So when you look at a natal chart, you're not just looking at the underlying structure of the psyche but the psyche as it is imprinted in the body. You can glean specific information about a person's constitution. You can see their disease predispositions, which organs might be strong or excessively active, and which are prone to weakness, deficiency, or underactivity.

Therein lies a powerful key to the synergy of astrological medicine and clinical herbalism, which is preventative medicine. This is the direction we should be moving in. Of course, we want to treat sick people and help them feel better and alleviate suffering, but it is perhaps a better approach to promote health, vitality, rejuvenation, and disease prevention. An ounce of prevention is said to be worth a pound of cure. It's much easier to prevent a disease from happening in the first place than it is to treat it, especially once something settles in deeply.

An essential premise of the Evolutionary Herbalism model is that we should understand a person holistically. We need to understand the connections between their psychological, emotional, and physical states. In fact, these states are not separate. They're entirely interconnected. By incorporating the astrological model into our approach to herbalism, we can recognize these connections more easily and, thus, treat the whole person.



For example, during the month of Aries, you would study the architecture of Aries: Cardinal, Fire, and Mars. Alongside that, you can study the pitta dosha (cardinal), the choleric temperament (Fire), and the heat/excitation tissue state (Mars). You can learn the anatomy and physiology of the parts of the body they govern, such as the HPA axis, the immune system, and blood. You can also study some fundamental herbal properties that relate, such as circulatory stimulants, diaphoretics, immune stimulants, pungents, and the warming energetic.

In short, the architecture of a sign provides a framework through which to study the corresponding aspects of herbal traditions, people, and plants. Be sure to reference the various tables of correspondences included in this e-book to help guide these various layers of study. Let's look at each of these and lay out in detail what you would want to study each month.

### Step 1: Studying People Holistically

Our first step is to consider the architecture of the sign and its relationship to different lenses for understanding people. This can be organized into four primary categories: 1) constitutional systems and energetics, 2) organ, system, and tissue anatomy and physiology, 3) pathological patterns, and 4) psychological, emotional and spiritual correlations.

#### 1. Constitutional Systems and Energetics

Here, you want to look at the mode that relates to that month's sign, whether it is cardinal, mutable, or fixed. From this, you'll want to take time to study the Āyurvedic *dosha* that corresponds to it and other triune constitutional systems, such as Rupert Sheldon's pattern of endomorph, mesomorph, and ectomorph. The same can be done using the elemental pattern and its correlation to the four humors of Galenic medicine. Lastly, the constitutional pattern of the planet and the sign as a whole can also be studied. An excellent resource is Judith Hill's *The Astrological Body Types*. As you go through the constitutional patterns, it's important to see the similarities and differences between each system and tradition.

Using our Aries example, because it's a cardinal-fire sign, this is an opportunity to study pitta dosha, the choleric humor, and their associated characteristics. For the planetary correspondence, study the physiognomy of Mars.

#### 2. Organ, System, and Tissue Anatomy and Physiology

Each planet and sign has specific anatomical correlations, as do the elemental and triune patterns, so this is the time to dig into anatomy and physiology. This can be a little intimidating because the books are huge, and you might feel like you're going back to school. But if you want to help people with herbs, you should know how the body functions. This is an important area in which to invest your study time.



During this time, look into which part of the body the sign, planet, element, and mode/dosha rules. Aries rules the head area - the brain is part of that, but it has other rulerships too. Mars rules Aries, so which parts of the body does Mars rule? It rules the blood and male reproductive system. It governs the adrenal glands, the HPA axis—the body’s stress response—and the immune system. So, during the month of Aries, study those organs, systems, and tissues. You could do a similar thing for the ruling element and mode for that sign.

### 3. Pathological Patterns

Each sign has predispositions associated with disease or symptomatic patterns. This is an opportunity to study those pathological patterns. On the one hand, there are diseases you could study for more of a modern medicine approach. However, there are also overall energetic patterns and tendencies or predispositions. For example, Aries is prone to inflammatory diseases, so this is a perfect time to study the inflammation process. Because Aries is associated with immunity, you could study the underlying pathophysiology of autoimmunity, a prevalent problem in the modern world. Aries tend to be inflamed; they tend to have immunological issues, maybe blood disorders as well. So you could study those pathological patterns.

This is also a good time to study any associated tissue states. In our Aries example, they’re predisposed to heat/excitation. You can take this and relate it to the characteristics of the dosha and the element. What types of conditions is a pitta person prone to? Which conditions are related to the fire element? If you were to list the disease predispositions of the associated *dosha*, element, planet, and sign and merge them, what would it look like? This gives you an excellent understanding of the nature of the sign and its corresponding architecture.

### 4. Psychological, Emotional, and Spiritual Correlations

What are some of that sign’s common psychological characteristics and traits, and its corresponding attributes or architecture? For Aries, we’d ask, “What is the psychological function of Mars? What does Mars represent in the psyche?”

While studying the dynamics of the sign, planet, element, and mode, translate that into physical attributes. For example, how is it that the ram of Aries charges into things headfirst and thinks about consequences later? Aries has a fiery nature; sometimes, there’s a combative nature and intense exertion of the will to live. How does that translate into what they experience in their body?

This is when we start to understand the essential nature of the sign. There’s an essential archetypal characteristic of the sign that reflects on a spiritual level. What is



it trying to teach us? How is it a step in an evolutionary process? What does it represent psychologically and emotionally, and how does that relate to what it represents physically? One essence is reflected on all of those levels, so while we separate these levels to study them individually, the goal is to see the essence of the human being as a whole.

This method will allow you to understand how each sign reflects within people on a holistic level. It also takes your understanding of the sign itself beyond merely memorizing traits and characteristics because you've learned its fundamental building blocks. This will enhance your practice as an herbalist because it takes you beyond looking only at the disease or the symptom and toward looking at the whole person. As holistic herbalists, our goal is to treat the person with the disease and not just the disease itself. But of course, to succeed at this, we must turn our attention to the plants themselves.

## Step Two: Studying Plants Holistically

Just as we did with people, we can organize our approach to studying plants in a holistic manner as well, breaking it down into primary categories to focus on and relate to the architecture of the zodiac signs. While there's *a lot* one can study about herbs, from a therapeutic perspective, there are a few fundamentals to focus on: 1) the taste, 2) organ, system, and tissue affinities, 3) medicinal actions, and 4) energetics.

### 1. Tastes

In general, according to tradition, there are five primary tastes of herbs: pungent, sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. Āyurveda adds astringent as a sixth taste, though technically, it is a "mouthfeel" and not a true taste. The taste of an herb is by no means inconsequential. It is incredibly important as it gives ample information about the herb's medicinal virtues. Through taste, you can decipher much about a plant.

Indeed, many herbal traditions have correlated the tastes of herbs to the elements as having specific influences on the constitution, affecting particular organ systems, etc. So, as you work through the architecture of the sign, think of the taste of the herbs. Which tastes would be similar in nature to the architecture of that sign?

We talked about Aries in step one. Aries is fiery, cardinal/*pitta*, and linked to Mars. The taste correlation here would be hot, spicy, and pungent. You should base your understanding of a taste on the mode, element, and planet related to that sign. This lends great insights into what types of plants might correspond to this sign.

### 2. Organ, System, and Tissue Affinities

Obviously, herbs target specific parts of the body. Some herbs bear a strong affinity for



the lungs and respiratory system. Others influence the heart or kidneys. Some may predominantly affect the liver and digestion system. In part one of the zodiacal study strategy, we outlined the primary areas of the body that correspond to the architecture of the sign. This ultimately provides the framework through which you'll determine the affinities of the plants that will relate to this sign.

I like to break this down into systems, organs, and tissues, which move from a greater level of organization down to a more specific level. For some herbalists, these delineations seem unnecessary and overly precise. But, alas, some plants will influence an entire organ system- say the respiratory system- while others may more specifically target the lungs and *not* the sinuses (part of the respiratory system). Other herbs may have their affinity not necessarily be a system or organ, but a specific tissue type, such as the muscles or the mucosa.

### 3. Medicinal Actions

While the system, organ, and tissue affinities tell you *where* an herb will travel within the body and have an influence, actions tell you *what* the herb will do when it gets there. These are the fundamental properties that an herb has, helping you predictably know what it will do when you take it and, therefore, how you would use it therapeutically. In Western herbalism, these are the fundamental virtues of the plants and essential to know.

We can understand which herbal actions relate to the architecture of a sign based on a few different factors. One would be what was described in the previous step: the organ, system, and tissue affinities. An example of this would be the Air element governing the lungs and thus relating to expectorants. Another way we can see these relationships is to look at the overall qualities and characteristics of any piece of energetic architecture. For example, the *pitta dosha* and Mars are similar in nature to pungent, hot circulatory stimulants that drive the blood and stimulate diaphoresis.

We could also consider that Mars relates to the blood, male reproductive, and immune systems. Antidyscratic alteratives are used to cleanse and purify the blood. They are often used for skin conditions but work by cleansing the blood. Blood builders are rich in nutrients, especially iron, and thus increase and strengthen Mars. We could think through herbs that operate on bleeding disorders, such as styptics, which stop bleeding. We could think about herbs that influence the immune system—immune stimulants, immune amphoterics, immunoregulators. Prostate tonics might bear a strong relationship to Mars as well.

This can get a bit complex because there are two ways to look at it when it comes to herbs. One way is the sympathetic approach. Since Aries and Mars are associated with the immune system and blood, if we think sympathetically, we'll look at herbs that act on the immune system or on the blood. The actions are similar in nature to the



constellation of that sign. The other way of looking at it is antipathetic or an opposite quality—the quality in a plant that’s opposite to the quality of the sign but is remedial to it. For example, Aries is hot, fiery, and inflamed. An herb that is cooling in nature would cool down excess heat, inflammation, and irritation. In this case, the herb has the opposite quality to the sign.

In the beginning, it’s best to think in terms of sympathy and herbs that have a similar quality to the architecture of a sign. This helps you to learn the fundamental principles, which is the whole premise of this study strategy. It also makes your study process *experiential* rather than just intellectual. So instead of studying Aries and having it be a big, esoteric concept, you could take an herb with a similar quality, ingest it, and actually experience it. You can experience the quality of Aries, Mars, and cardinal-Fire by taking a remedy and feeling its effect in your body. This makes your studies incredibly powerful and transformative, making it a process of not just accumulating facts or even knowledge but a deeper level of experiential understanding, which, over time, can blossom into wisdom.

#### 4. Energetics

Lastly, we have herbal energetics. If you’re unfamiliar with the concept of energetics, it’s important to clarify what we mean and don’t mean by that term. Energetics doesn’t mean esoteric properties or spiritual qualities. In this case, I’m referring to the herb’s ecological impact on the body’s tissues. This is typically delineated by the temperature, moisture, and tonal effects. Is it hot or cold? Is it moistening or drying? Does it relax tension or contract and tighten tension? What is the temperature, moisture, and tone of plants related to the sign?

So again, what energetics might relate to it based on the overall qualities of the mode, the element, the planet, and the general qualities of the sign? With Aries, it will be hot, spicy, pungent herbs. What does heat do? Heat tends to dry things out. So we would see that hot and dry herbs would be most sympathetic to the quality of Aries.

As you can see in steps 1 and 2, you’re studying multiple attributes of herbal medicine while at the same time doing it in the context of a zodiac sign. *You’re actually learning the zodiac sign at the same time, which is a powerful combination.*

#### Step Three: Materia Medica

The third and final step in the zodiacal study strategy is to take everything you’ve put together thus far in the process and translate it into some specific plants. With your lists of tastes, actions, organ affinities, and energetics, you can look for plants corresponding to the zodiac sign, its ruling planet, element, and mode. This step is a bit like a treasure hunt as you search for the plants that match the qualities and characteristics of the archetypal forces you’ve been studying.



This is a powerful approach to deciphering the correlations between medicinal plants and astrological principles. Many people rely on books for this information. They wonder which herbs are ruled by Venus, so they go to a book, look it up, and get a list of Venus herbs. But those books often don't explain why Venus rules an herb. Is it because it looks pretty and has a nice smell? Is it because it influences the female reproductive system or relaxes tension? *What is it about the herb that relates it to Venus?*

Usually, this isn't well explained, and there aren't many great references for this information. Figuring it out for yourself is a better approach because it helps you to understand the *why* behind plant-planet correspondences. In the process of learning about an herb, you get to know the herb very well. You learn the principles of herbal medicine behind how the herb functions. At the same time, you're learning astrology.

As you hunt for herbs that relate to a sign, you can consider the spectrum of sympathy and antipathy, whether the herb is similar (sympathetic) to the sign you're studying or opposing/remedial (antipathetic) to the sign. For example, a simple example of an herb that might be Aries in nature is Cayenne pepper (*Capsicum annuum*). It's super hot, spicy, and pungent, so it drives the blood. It's a stimulant and diaphoretic to treat fever, rising, expanding, and drying like fire. These qualities relate to Aries and its associated architecture (Mars, Fire, Cardinal).

An Aries opposing plant could cool down heat and maybe work via the opposing sign, Libra. Libra is the balancing force to Aries because it is its opposing sign, 180 degrees away. Yarrow is an interesting example of a cooling bitter herb that regulates heat and irritation; it cools inflammation. It is an antipathetic herb to some of the qualities of Aries, which can be seen in its styptic attribute. It also treats fever as a cooling diaphoretic. Therefore, it's a good remedy for Aries qualities. Take the time to find a couple of herbs that correlate to the sign and study those herbs in depth.

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In this process, you've put a strategic container around your approach to studying herbal medicine. One of the main problems people have is that their studies are far too random and scattered, and lack an end goal and thus lack a strategy. You might read a little about one herb and a little about another. When you put a framework around it with a strategic approach, you will accelerate your learning process.

You'll learn not only about various herbs but also the fundamentals of herbal medicine. We cannot learn herbs based only on what they're good for and which diseases they treat. We need to have a fundamental understanding of what the herb will do to a person who takes it, which leads to a particular therapeutic result. It is important to understand the *why* behind "this herb is good for that problem." This process will help you achieve that goal. You will learn constitutional systems, anatomy



and physiology, and fundamental properties of plants—all of it bundled together in the context of the astrological signs.

This is a fun way to study because you get your books out, cross-reference them, and hopefully take notes. It is an excellent opportunity to start a journal, a folder on your computer, or a note on your phone—however you'd like to organize the information. You'll be able to build a library of knowledge and make connections between these systems. When you look at the same thing through different perspectives, you'll find that you have a more well-rounded understanding of these systems.

So this is the zodiacal study strategy; hopefully it will give you context and understanding for how to approach studying both herbalism and astrology at the same time. If you incorporate this strategy over the next year, you will look back and be amazed at how much you've learned in just 12 months.

## Planetary Tables

There are various levels of correspondence to the planets. In terms of human physiology and anatomy, they rule parts/organs/systems of the body and bodily functions.

We can also view the Elements from a perspective of Yin and Yang, seeing whether the planet is active and dynamic or passive.

	Sun	Moon	Mercury	Mars	Venus	Saturn	Jupiter
Day	Sunday	Monday	Wednesday	Tuesday	Friday	Saturday	Thursday
Main Organ	Heart	Brain	Lungs	Blood	Kidneys	Spleen	Liver
Secondary Organ	Blood Solar plexus	Stomach	Mind	Gallbladder Adrenals	Bladder	BonesJoints	Gallbladder (w/Mars)
System	Circulatory Agni Vital force	Nervous Digestive	Respiratory Digestive Nervous	Immune. Catabolism Fight/flight	Genito- urinary Reproductive	Skeletal Structural Anabolic	Metabolic/ Digestive
Tissue	Plasma	Marrow	Lymph	Muscles Tendons	Mucous	Bones	Fat
Botanical	Crataegus Hypericum	Avena Artemesia	Ligusticum Foeniculum	Urtica Oplopanax	Althea Pulsatilla Rose	Ceanothus Equisetum Datura	Arctium Melissa
Mineral	Gold	Silver	Mercury	Iron	Copper	Lead	Tin
Benevolent/ Malevolent	Benevolent	Benevolent	Neutral	Malevolent	Benevolent	Malevolent	Benevolent



## Planetary Polarity

There are various levels of correspondence to the planets. In terms of human physiology and anatomy, they rule parts/organs/systems of the body and bodily functions.

We can also view the Elements from a perspective of Yin and Yang, seeing whether the planet is active and dynamic or passive.

Yin/Feminine Planets	Yang/Masculine Planets
Venus	Mars
Moon	Sun
Saturn (Has masculine aspects as well)	Jupiter
Mercury (androgynous)	